

Message to all Lady bowlers of Hertfordshire from Alan Spicer – Johns/Walker Team Manager

It's that time of year when thoughts turn to the summer and once again enjoying outdoor competitive bowls. After the relative success of the 2019 campaign, I remain your Johns Trophy and Walker Cup Manager and the overriding priority is to build on what we achieved last year.

Firstly, I want to reproduce exactly what I wrote this time last year, about my goals for that upcoming season. These were (a) to do better than last year (b) to compete with opposing sides and make them apprehensive when it comes to playing Hertfordshire (c) to be proud to pull on a Hertfordshire shirt and, at the end of the day, feel we tried to the best of our ability. We achieved (a) quite comfortably in the end, even with a loss in the first game at Leicestershire (4-18). I also think we accomplished half of (b) and all of (c) so the target is to continue in that vein – improving on this for 2020 would be an even better goal (and achievable) but perhaps that is a more feasible objective for 2021 as this was always a three year plan.

Right, let's look forward to this coming season – 100 year Centenary for the men – and how the Johns will evolve here in Hertfordshire. I suppose the first change from last year is the movement of the trial dates – later by two weeks. No-one can predict the weather but perhaps this not only gives a chance of it being warmer, it may allow more practice time for players! There is also a trial date in August (for squad consideration in 2021) which you can nominate now, but nominations for this date will be open up to 1st August. This will, hopefully, encourage players who have done well in County and Area competitions to trial whilst they have success in their blood and still at the peak of their form. This will be publicised again in July. This initiative was a result of player input and I welcome any other ideas for consideration that will benefit the Johns Team going forward.

At least one training morning is being introduced, the first one being the week before the first Johns game. This will be by invitation, but I need your availability in advance to gauge support, or not, for this initiative. There is a possibility of further training mornings during the season but that is something for the future.

Perhaps the biggest change for 2020 will be the reduction, to 28, of the Johns squad. Last year I felt that 30 was the right number to ensure the usual unavailability issues are covered and I would have been very comfortable for any of the 30 squad members playing. In fact, the 2019 trials were extremely encouraging as there was little to choose between upwards of 40 players so the ones that missed out were unfortunate. How I am going to get around the smaller squad conundrum is as follows:-

This season 28 players will be selected to represent Hertfordshire in the Johns for 2020, with an additional two named stand-ins should any of the original 28 be unable to play in a particular match (illness, wedding, non-arrival etc.). These two players will hold themselves in readiness to replace unavailable players as reserves. Attendance, for these stand-in players, for each match, will not be compulsory but will be highly recommended. Should any of the originally selected squad be unavailable for the rest of the season then they will be replaced by one of the two stand-ins. I recognise that this will not be as desirable as being in the squad, but would still be a vital service to the County and to me as Team Manager. NB There will be an option on the nomination form, to indicate that you would not wish to be considered for a stand-in role and doing so will not jeopardise inclusion in the 28 player squad.

I am anticipating that this year's selection will be equally as hard with the likelihood of even more players being capable of being selected in the squad. My squad selection philosophy is similar to Alex Ferguson in so much as there must be progression within the Team which can be partially achieved by continually refreshing the squad, year on year. My expectation would be that there will be several non-2019 squad players selected to invigorate the 2020 squad. It would be wrong to put a specific number on this but it is essential that players strive for improvement. Previous years' non-squad players must always believe they can become (or be re-called as) a Johns Player.

Please see the trial note regarding more details of the trials, including trialling for the Walker Cup. The trials are scheduled to be held over two Saturday mornings (until 1:30pm) and will be run similar to 2019. Obviously, it would be better, for me, if you are available for both days but if one of them is impossible then I can still live with that.

Trials

This will be held over two days in May and one day in August starting at 10:00 (but very important to report by 09:30 please for the day to run smoothly). There will be two sessions of 1½ hours or when ten ends have been played, with the session timings being: 10:00 – 11:30 & 11:45 – 13:15.

The number of trialists will determine the number of matches being played per session. It will be rink against rink **and in teams**. I may ask a few of you to assess one game (I will explain on the day how I want this to be approached) but that would be dependent on 'no shows'. The plan would be for invitees to play both sessions. I would expect that in 1½ hours, ten ends will be completed but as it is time determined, it may be slightly less. Once ten ends have been played, you can stop!

The aim is to have a 28 woman squad at the end of all this who have talent, desire and belief to compete with the best. I would like to suggest the 2020 Johns Squad adopt, as last year, the Babe Ruth quote - "It's hard to beat a person who never gives up".

The Walker Cup squad of 10 players will again ideally be selected from the Johns Squad but, because of the possibility of an outstanding player being unavailable on Saturdays but available on Sundays, this may not be adhered to. If this is the case then nominating just for the Walker Cup is acceptable.